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SUBJECT: CHAD: 2009 HARVEST AND FOOD SECURITY SITUATION  
WORRISOME BUT NOT DIRE

REF: STATE 108138

¶1. (SBU) In light of concerns on the part of NGO contacts and others that this year's cereals harvest will fall short of meeting Chad's food needs, Embassy staff had conversations October 27 and 28 with Ministry of Agriculture officials including Docteur Paul, Deputy Director of Production and Agricultural Statistics in the Food Security Division; Goipage Akoul Idris, Director of Plant Production; and David Adoge-Bang Weinor, Cabinet Director to the Minister, about the current food security situation in Chad. All confirmed that Chad's present national estimate for this year's grain harvest -- 1.2 million tons -- fell short of the 1.4 million tons considered necessary to sustain exiting levels of nutrition throughout the country. The MoA contacts told us that the Ministry was watching closely as Chad's harvest season approached at the end of the year, given that lack of rainfall this summer seemed to be slowing maturation rates for corn and millet, and in certain areas causing crops to dry up completely. Goipage also noted that spider infestations had taken an unusually large toll on grain this year, and that as less arable land was available, grain-eating birds were having a more deleterious impact than formerly on crops in fields. Paul said that Chad was working with international donors including WFP to attempt to develop a better understanding of the relationship between poor implementation of environmental policy, which was resulting in desertification and increasing land infertility, and this year's expected low crop yields.

¶2. (SBU) Paul advised that Chad had most recently revised its National Food Security Plan to take into account expected shortfalls in this year's harvest in early October. One key element of the revised plan would be attempts to stockpile foodstuffs for eventual government distribution, should this become necessary. Based on the updated plan, some animal feed was being prepositioned in areas where food animals were suffering and dying prematurely from lack of water and nutrition. Paul indicated that the MoA was also trying to address traditional tensions between farmers and herders over use of arable land for grazing, which had expanded this year and now also involved tensions among different groups of herders competing for use of pastures. According to Paul, the MoA also had plans to subsidize food prices in zones most at risk, in order to curb expected social unrest if shortages caused grain prices to rise. (NOTE: Chad's National Food Security Plan is formally scheduled for review and revision again in April 2010, or sooner if conditions warrant. The MoA is receiving technical assistance from the FAO and French Cooperation (USAID-equivalent) with the Plan.)

¶3. (SBU) Meanwhile, Minister of Agriculture Mbailao Naimbaye Lossimian, who has recently returned from the UNGA and participation in the luncheon on food security hosted by Secretary Clinton, has been presiding over a series of events calling for "public mobilization" in the aim of maximizing harvests so as to limit hunger and malnutrition. On October

16, designated "National Food Security Day" in conjunction with International Nutrition Day, Minister Mbailao expressed hope that Chad could achieve food security even as the likelihood of crisis increased, and announced the Government's intention to distribute 100 tractors and 30,000 plows in an effort to boost grain production.

14. (SBU) On October 23, Governor Ngamai Djari of Kanem, a chronic food deficit zone, was interviewed on the food security situation in his province. Djari expressed concern that rainfall was down this year and ouadis were shallower than normal. He indicated that a number of NGOs were aware of the situation and attempting to address it, but no miracle solutions appeared to be available.

15. (SBU) We took the opportunity of our meetings with MoA officials to deliver reftel demarche on the FDA's new Reportable Food Registry. Weinor noted that Chad appreciated the U.S. Administration's development of a tool designed to protect human and animal nutritional well-being. Chad would provide information as necessary to the database, he added.

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COMMENT  
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16. (SBU) The MOA officials are the latest in a series of local contacts to express concern to us about prospects for this year's harvest. At a briefing last week, a joint FEWS-CILSS-World Food Program crop assessment team projected a harvest in the neighborhood of 1.1 million tons, vice the 1.7 million tons that were gathered in 2008-9 (and the 2.0 million tons that the Minister of Agriculture said he hoped

his gifts of plows and tractors would yield.) The FEWS-CILSS-WFP group admitted that it was still grappling with the degree of vulnerability of Chad's population, and indicated that it would be in a better position to make judgments after the first of the new year. Asked specifically whether the situation warranted the Embassy's requesting emergency Title II food aid imports, the team was unanimous that current circumstances did not justify such a step. We at the Embassy will rely on the USAID-funded Famine Early Warning System project to alert us to potential food crises, so that we can react with food aid if needed.

17. (SBU) In Kanem, the USG intervened following failed harvests in 1996 and 2001, through FFP and OFDA, with specific nutritional programs involving the operation of supplementary and therapeutic feeding centers, along with development projects aimed at boosting agricultural production in ouadis. In 2001, as a result of a poor harvest and spike in malnutrition rates, the Embassy declared a disaster and funded a nutrition rehabilitation program in Kanem. Toward the end of the program, OFDA fielded an evaluation team that concluded that the situation was chronic, and thus did not merit a disaster response. This year, both the WFP and UNICEF have advised Chad's Health Minister of their intent to provide resources for a nutrition rehabilitation program in Kanem, starting in 2010.  
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